

Wednesday, October 5, 2011

6:30-8:00PM

Minutes

San Fernando Valley
Service Council

Regular Meeting

Marvin Braude Constituent Service Center
6262 Van Nuys Blvd.
Van Nuys, CA 91401

Called to Order at: 6:29 p.m.

Council Members Present:
Kymberleigh Richards, Chair
Jesus Ochoa, Vice Chair
Richard Arvizu
Donald Weissman
Maribel De La Torre

Officers:

Jon Hillmer, Director Service Councils
Wilbur Babb, Community Relations
Manager
Collette Langston, Council Secretary



Los Angeles County
Metropolitan Transportation Authority

Metro

San Fernando Valley

1. Pledge of Allegiance

2. APPROVED **Minutes of the meeting held September 7, 2011.**

3. RECEIVED **Chair's Remarks**
Welcomed Maribel De La Torre from the City of San Fernando and because her attendance was not expected, she sat in as a non-voting member with the intent of being sworn in next month.

4. RECEIVED **Public Comment**
 - Rick Rofman – The last time he attended a meeting was in February 2008. He had two things he wanted to tell us about that were not related to the MTA and told us a story about the President and said he used to have dinner with the Vice President of the United States when he was in college. He was waiting on the northwest corner of Laurel Canyon and Ventura Blvd for Line 750, which never came. It didn't come for an hour and a half. He couldn't get across the street because the traffic light is 3 minutes of red light and 30 seconds of green light. He took an Orange Line bus to get to the West Valley. He wrote to Art Leahy and got a response. On the second occurrence, he didn't get a response and on the third occurrence he gave up and decided to just cross the street. He feels that this situation is treacherous and suggests that customers not wait for Line 750.

5. RECEIVED **Presentation on Bus Accident Reduction Program** by Maria Reynolds, Transportation Manager, Division 15. Accident prevention is a 24/7 job and it is everyone's responsibility from operating personnel to executive management. A well-skilled, well-trained, safe bus operator is our best defense. Metro uses the following methods, tools and strategies for accident prevention: new employee orientation, management and instructor line rides, accident follow-up rides, continuous training and a "hot spots" bulletin board.

Metro also has the ability to send out text messages to operators on the bus via ATMS. General notices are posted and there is an issuance of safety alert notices and monthly safety newsletters. Operators are recognized with certificates of merit for safe work performance. Safety milestones are celebrated and good rides/customer commendations for safe driving are also recognized.

The Local Safety Committee (LSC) is made up of:

- Transportation and maintenance management staff
- UTU and ATU representative employees
- LASD personnel
- Safety Department personnel

The LSC coordinates the overall safety efforts for each division, deals with specific division safety matters and concerns and is used as a forum to obtain feedback through the front line employee representatives. LSC also establishes and manages a safe working environment as well as implements safety policies and procedures.

The Incident Investigation Subcommittee's objective is to reduce and prevent the number of accidents and injuries within the division. They also ensure compliance with established safety policies and guidelines and implement appropriate corrective action. The Incident Investigation Subcommittee also improves existing accident investigation policies and procedures and analyses, accident reports, information, and data to help identify and trend any cluster of accidents and unsafe or hazardous conditions to prevent future accidents.

Chair – Can't help but remember one incident where she was present on the bus when it was hit, and the person that hit the bus said, "I didn't even see the bus." The Chair responded to this comment with "it's a 40 foot long, 10 foot tall orange box. What part of it couldn't you see?" This shows that Metro cannot do anything about stupidity on the part of the people with whom we share the road and maybe we need to lobby the State to include IQ tests before issuing drivers' licenses.

6. **RECEIVED report on Metro's Accessibility Compliance Program** by Chip Hazen, ADA Compliance Officer, Civil Rights Programs Compliance. Metro has been working to make improvements to the system for the past few years. The program has received a positive response from the public on these improvements. System wide, there are approximately 2,500 daily wheelchair boardings. All buses in Metro's fleet are ADA compliant; and a Motion was passed by the MTA Board directing the CEO to review services available to disabled passengers to ensure that they are receiving access to quality service on the Metro Transportation System.

The Accessible Service Quality Assurance Committee was created to discuss and resolve accessibility issues and improvements. There have been 4 notable changes to the administrative process.

1. All incidents involving riders with disabilities, including wheelchair users, are routed to the Civil Rights Program Compliance unit;

2. Claims for bodily injury and property damage of a person with a disability are forwarded to the Civil Rights Programs Compliance unit;
3. Passenger complaints and bus division resolutions are routed to the Civil Rights Programs Compliance unit;
4. Customer Relations will acknowledge the receipt of a complaint upon request following confirmation that appropriate action has been taken.

Metro's Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) created a list of 22 areas where accessibility can be improved. Two examples are:

1. A lack of access at gated rail stations for persons without the use of their arms or hands; and
2. A need for more signage in Braille and tactile letters denoting directions, bus stops, etc.

Metro will be installing Braille and tactile numbers at each bus stop along with the phone number for complaints and information. The first implementation phase will start later this fiscal year. The new ADA complaint form can be found on Metro's website.

The wheelchair marking and safety strap program evaluated 720 wheelchairs and found that 2/3 of the wheelchairs evaluated required that a strap be placed on the wheelchair to enable it to be secured. Access Services is now evaluating all wheelchairs of individuals requesting ADA Paratransit eligibility.

In March 2010, a special maintenance training campaign was conducted for all mechanics and supervisors describing the key accessibility features for all phases of maintenance. On April 1, 2010, Metro began a monthly fleet-wide inspection of lift and securement devices that included:

- Lift/ramp operation
- Side-seat condition and operation
- Restraint condition
- Belt buckle operation
- External alarm operation
- Stop request at wheelchair position
- Kneel mode on high floor buses
- Interlock system
- Priority seating decals
- Safety strap brochures
- Safety strap posters

Metro implemented a Mystery Rider Program in September 2009. The contractor observes approximately 200 bus operators monthly and reports on the ride using selected ADA issues such as:

- Calling all bus stops
- Whether external speakers were working at stops served by multiple lines
- Whether riders in wheelchairs were served and asked if they wanted their wheelchair secured
- Whether riders with oxygen were allowed to ride
- Whether the lift or ramp was deployed when needed
- Safety and other general types of issues

ADA training/certification training is required for all bus operators and trainees and includes training in ADA laws and regulations, Metro's policy regarding ADA, customer relations, checking accessible equipments, using accessible equipment and sensitivity training.

Future changes for accessibility compliance include:

- Performance measures for accessibility posted on Metro's website
- New office for Civil Rights Programs Compliance (ADA, Title VI, and EEO) as part of the Office of the CEO
- Civil Rights to review all projects' effective accessibility and sign-off for accessibility on construction projects
- Peer review by outside agency of Metro's accessibility program (OCTA)
- Civil Rights Program Compliance is to monitor accessibility of Metro services and work with the Department to correct any barriers to accessibility
- Develop an Operator's recognition program of Operators who are outstanding in the provision of service to persons with disabilities
- Bus Operators are required to leave the bus seat, prepare wheelchair securement area, and inform rider, with their permission, that they will secure their wheelchair
- Procure various models of wheelchairs and train Bus Operators on the securement of wheelchairs
- All Operations personnel, including managers, assistant managers, and executive officers must attend a training program on sensitivity towards persons with disabilities

Vice Chair Ochoa – When you refer to mobility devices, are walkers included?

Mr. Hazen – Yes.

Vice Chair Ochoa – And the training also includes those?

Mr. Hazen – Yes. We have had some problems with walkers because some don't fold anymore. They are creating a problem for us. The Federal Transportation Administration just changed the regulations and they go into effect in a week and a half. It says that a walker can come on board, we have to secure them, but they cannot ride in them. People who want to ride in their walker won't be able to. Metro's policy has always been that they have to transfer to a seat, regardless, so it doesn't affect us very much but it's nice to know that the regulations now agree with our policy.

Chair – There have been numerous times when riding a bus where, many of them loaded to capacity with standing room only, and someone has boarded with a walker and even though the walker is foldable, they have refused to do so. This becomes a safety issue for those in the aisle. What is our policy regarding those individuals? Do we have some way of compelling them to comply with what would otherwise be a safety issue for us?

Mr. Hazen – We are changing our policy on walkers; but as it is, they must go into the wheelchair securement area and they must be secured or folded in that area. Unless they can go with them at the seat. Legal has signed off on that; and if they refuse to do that, we will not be taking them.

Chair – Let me see if I understand this correctly. If someone boards with a walker and they proceed to what would be the wheelchair securement area, except the seat is still down, and they sit there but they refuse to fold the walker and it is now jutting into the aisle. Will that be a situation where we have to say, "Fold it or get back off the bus"?

Mr. Hazen – Unfortunately, yes. It's going to be difficult to try to do.

Chair – I understand that but I don't have a problem with that because there has to be a balance between the accommodations for those with disabilities and overall system safety. With the change in the headways to make our service more efficient, it doesn't take the wheelchair factor into account.

Mr. Hazen – Each time a person in a wheelchair is passed up, they are to notify Bus Operations Control. When they note that it is going to be a 30 minute or longer wait, they are required to send out another bus or contact Access Services to come out and pick them up.

Chair – Sounds to me like it would be less expensive to run more service in the first place.

Mr. Hazen – I cannot address that.

Dr. Arvizu – Well that's called reasonable accommodations. That's the reason why they have that term.

Mr. Hazen – On those policies, they are proposed policies that have not been adopted yet. In other words, Operations has not had a chance to make comments on it.

De La Torre – You stated that 2/3 of the wheelchairs evaluated required that a strap be placed on them. How is the other 1/3 in compliance?

Mr. Hazen – It's no problem to put the hook on the wheelchair. We just put a marking on it, a piece of yellow tape, and then the operators are taught to go to the yellow strap or go to the yellow tape in order to secure the wheelchair.

De La Torre – So it's not like a manufacturers' issue or anything like that.

Mr. Hazen – Some of them are. There isn't a requirement, but a suggested remedy, a device called WC19. WC19 wheelchairs are wheelchairs that have eyelets on it that you can easily put the hook onto to secure the wheelchair. It has also been designed to withstand a 30 MPH crash when secured properly. Wheelchairs that do not meet the WC19 standards will not survive a 30 MPH crash. They will basically disintegrate.

De La Torre – The reason that I ask is because I'm assuming that every time one of these wheelchairs has to be strapped it means that there is additional time being spent by the bus driver to be able to do this work. I was wondering what type of policy issues can be supported to pass legislation at the state level to make sure that more streamlined processes occur. I was wondering if the manufacturers can develop wheelchairs that allow the process to be expedited.

Mr. Hazen – Earlier this year was the first time that the wheelchair manufacturers sat down with the Federal Transit Administration. In the past they basically said, "We don't care and it's not our problem."

De La Torre – With the rising numbers that you pointed out I think that it is an issue.

Mr. Hazen – It is in their interest to sit down and they are starting to understand that concept. The problem with the WC19 package that can be put on a wheelchair is that our Federal government does not pay for it. When the wheelchairs are paid for they are only to be used indoors, not to be used outside the house. This is a catch 22 for the people in wheelchairs.

Weissman – Are the procedures for ADA compliance posted on the bus? Or is there a plan to post them on the bus?

Mr. Hazen – No, but there is information on the website regarding that and we are currently working on a booklet that will be offered as a take-one.

Chair – I would like to entertain a Motion that this Council supports the addition of car cards on each Metro vehicle, explaining those policies so there is something for the Operator to point to in a dispute. I entertain that as a Motion if anyone wants to move it forward and second it.

The Motion was moved by Weissman, seconded by the Chair and unanimously approved.

Vice Chair Ochoa – Commented that the cards should be near the wheelchair area.

Chair – Posted over the accessibility area, near the front of the vehicle.

Mr. Hazen – Right now we have one that is posted over it that is required under the lawsuit.

Chair – I’m talking more along the lines of what Don said. Spell out for the customer, here’s what we have to do, here’s what you have to do. So if there is a dispute, the operator can point up and say, “That’s what it says.”

Hillmer – Let me bring this back to the Council with some mock-ups or concepts that could be used and where it could be posted on the bus. It also may be handy to have the operators with a card or a take-one that they can hand to the customer if you’re not allowing the customer to get on the bus.

Chair – Don, how about we make that Motion a report back and based on what we see, we’ll send our recommendations to Mr. Hazen’s office.

Weissman – Acceptable.

Chair – Any objections. Such is the order. 90 days? 60 days?

Hillmer – In the next 60 days.

- Faramarz Nabavi – I’d like to express support for what the Chair proposed, both in terms of having some type of placard that provides information to patrons and also the insight that you derived from your research of the headways is entirely consistent with my observations as a transit user and advocate as well. With respect to Metro Rail stations, there are a number of stations that have multiple entrances but only one of those entrances has an extra wide, ADA accessible turnstile, although I’m assuming the logic that caused that to happen was, if there is an elevator at the entrance, then we will put in the extra wide ADA accessible turnstile. In fact, there are many people that may be using a cane, who may not need to be on an elevator but would benefit from having the extra wide turnstile. I’d like that to be in the record and in the recommendations for ADA accessibility

